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## SUGGESTIONS FROM EMPLOYEES HELP COMPANY SAVE MONEY

By EDWIN A. HUNGER,  
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The Eastman Kodak Company has found that a system by means of which employes can make suggestions for improving its products or manufacturing conditions and get suitable rewards for the ones adopted, is good business—it pays. There is nothing philanthropic and no smack of welfare work about it at all. Not infrequently a suggestion turned in by one of the employes may result in considerable savings to the company.

Then again the thought of “cashing in” on worth while ideas tends to pull the employe out of the usual rut of things. He feels that he, too, is an important cog in the big machine; for, if he were not, his idea would not be used. When he sees his name published in one of the works’ bulletins he takes pride in the fact. It means that he will keep his eyes open thereafter and think harder and faster with the idea of turning out more money-paying suggestions. His confreres are similarly affected. They say to themselves: “If so-and-so can produce something that brings a money prize, why can’t we?” So it goes. The spirit is contagious, and as a net result the entire force is put on its toes. Everybody racks his mind for new schemes for producing better goods, better processes and better conditions. When such a spirit is put forth, nothing but good can result for the company.

The Eastman Kodak Company is a very large concern and operates five plants in various parts of Rochester. Of course, where plants are separate, as these are, and each is a distinct unit manufacturing certain definite products, it is necessary to adopt methods of factory control and organization suited to the special requirements of each plant. For this reason, the suggestion systems utilized in the various plants differ somewhat from each other.

In the Kodak Park Works, the largest plant of the company, where some 3,000 men and 1,500 women are employed, standard suggestion blanks are placed at convenient points about the plant.

Any employe having a suggestion to make writes out a full description of his idea on the blank, places it in an envelope addressed to the manager's office, and drops it in one of the locked mail boxes, a number of which are installed in different parts of the plant especially for the purpose. If a sketch is necessary to illustrate the employe's idea and he has not the necessary skill to make one, he is permitted to go to the company's drafting room and have a draftsman make a simple sketch for him. A stub is attached to the suggestion blank on which the author makes note of his idea for reference purposes. The number of the suggestion blank is printed on this stub and a separate blank is utilized for each suggestion in order to facilitate handling. If a drawing is attached to the suggestion blank, the number of the blank is written on the drawing.

The suggestions are collected several times daily and sent to the manager's office. Every blank is there stamped with the date on which it was collected. It has been found necessary to do this because on several occasions different employes have made suggestions on the same thing nearly simultaneously, and until the suggestion blanks were stamped, the question of priority could not be determined. As soon as the suggestion blank is stamped, a special blank acknowledging receipt of the suggestion is sent to its author, and a copy with the name of the employe making the suggestion written on it is brought to the attention of the superintendent of the department to which the suggestion applies. He investigates the merits of the idea and returns the suggestion to the manager's office with reasons for approval or rejection as the case may be. If the recommendation for approval by the superintendent is endorsed by the manager, the superintendent is instructed to carry out the suggestion and a report on another special blank is sent to the author of the suggestion, stating that his idea has been adopted. If the suggestion is not adopted, the maker is advised of that fact also, and is told why his idea is rejected.

At the end of each month all the suggestions that have been adopted and put in operation during the month, together with a brief description of the ideas and their advantages, are listed and copies sent to each member of the suggestion committee, which consists of the superintendents of the various departments. A few days later a meeting is held for the purpose of making awards for suggestions handed in during the month. Each suggestion on the

list is taken up by the superintendent who had charge of putting it into practice, the superintendent at the same time giving his idea of the award the suggestion merits. A discussion of the advantages of the suggestion follows and a vote is taken as to the awards to be made and the amounts of each. Suitable lists are then prepared of the successful suggestions and the amount of money for each, for publication in the *Kodak Park Bulletin*. A works' bulletin of this kind is invaluable as a medium for advertising the suggestion system to the employes and arousing them to the advantages of participating in the making of suggestions. Always immediately after lists of awards have been published, the influx of suggestions increases. For the sake of stimulating the employes to get in the suggestion game, awards are made each month. Formerly awards were made only every three months, but it was found that not nearly so much interest was manifested as when the announcements were made more frequently. Like many other good things it needs intensive advertising, and that is where the bulletin serves a very good and useful purpose.

Suggestions are divided into five groups, as follows: (1) improvements in products; (2) reductions in costs; (3) improvements in manufacturing methods; (4) reduction in accident and fire hazards; and (5) conveniences; the minimum award for suggestions in the respective groups being \$5, \$4, \$3, \$2 and \$1. The purpose of making the minimum awards different is to encourage the employes to give most of their attention to ideas of most value. The amount of money awarded varies according to the estimated value of the suggestion to the company. Sums as high as \$1,100 have been awarded to employes for especially good suggestions. Careful records are kept of improved conditions as a result of suggestions adopted, and for all suggestions which bring about greater savings than at first estimated supplementary awards are made. Of course, these supplementary awards come to the employes like windfalls and cannot but create a good feeling between the employe and the company.

It is the practice in some places where the suggestion system is in operation not to allow the foremen to enter suggestions for which they may expect to receive compensation. Wherever feasible foremen at the Kodak Park Works are not excluded from the privileges of the suggestion system, and it is thought that this is a good plan

since some of the very best ideas that have been obtained have come from them—ideas that probably would not have been brought forward had there not been prospect of direct compensation. Suggestions coming from foremen are written on pink slips.

So-called non-participating foremen's prizes are also awarded. These go to foremen of two groups, those having six to twenty-five men under them, and those with more than twenty-five men under them. In each group four prizes are awarded every four months, \$25 and \$10 being awarded as first and second prizes to the foremen having the greatest number of adopted suggestions coming from men under them and similar prizes going to foremen whose men have turned in suggestions of greatest value. Foremen who compete for these prizes are not allowed to enter suggestions in the usual way, but are permitted to help their men in preparing their suggestions.

If the author of a suggestion is not satisfied with an explanation rejecting his idea, he is allowed to go to the superintendent and discuss his idea even after taking it up with his foreman or assistant foreman. A grievance committee, made up of workmen, also meets periodically for hearing complaints, getting suggestions for improving the system and answering questions.

The number of adopted suggestions in the Kodak Park Plant in 1916 came to 1,000 out of a total of 2,300 handed in. The average number of adopted suggestions runs to between 40 per cent and 45 per cent of the total number of suggestions handed in.

The Camera Works, the next largest plant of the Eastman Kodak Company, employs a somewhat different suggestion system from that used in the Kodak Park Works. Here the organization for handling the suggestions consists of a general chairman, a secretary and five special committees, each of which is made up of three department heads. The suggestions are classed in five groups, as follows, and each group is looked after by one of the special committees: cost reduction, improvement of product, general maintenance, accident prevention and improvement in manufacturing methods.

The blank on which the employe of the Camera Works describes his idea is radically different from that used at the Kodak Park Plant. It is provided with a stub, but the author of the suggestion writes his name on this stub only, which is removed by the secretary before being handed over to the proper committee. In

other words, none of the men on the committee is allowed to know the name of the author of the suggestion on which he passes.

All suggestions are sent to the general manager of the plant, who refers them to the secretary of the suggestion committee for classification and acknowledgment, after which they are referred to the various committees for action. The committees return a separate written report for each suggestion with a definite statement as to whether the suggestion is approved or not, and if not approved stating the reason.

All approved suggestions are referred to the general manager for final approval, and then a note is sent to the author of the suggestion saying that his suggestion has been approved and stating the amount of the award. Awards for suggestions which effect a saving are based on the estimated amount of the saving for one year and after each suggestion has been in effect for a full year, the actual saving for the year is figured and if it exceeds the amount of the estimate a further award is made.

Lists of awards are published in the *Camera Works' Bulletin*. At the end of each year an honor roll is also published which contains names of all employees who have received \$25 or more for suggestions for the year. The number of suggestions received in the Camera Works in 1916 was 1,618, out of which 595, or 29 per cent, were adopted. The number of suggestions adopted per 100 employees was 23.

In the other plants of the Eastman Kodak Company modifications of the systems outlined above are employed.